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HAVOC AS CHIMP GOES APE - 200-POUND 'PET' SHOT DEAD AFTER MAULING WOMAN, CHARGING COPS AT CONN. HOME

BRIGITTE WILLIAMS-JAMES in Stamford, Conn., and RICH CALDER in New York

A massive chimp who loved flowers, filet mignon and the Yankees went berserk outside his Connecticut home yesterday, mauling his owner's friend before being killed by cops.

Capt. Richard Conklin of the Stamford police said officers had no choice but to open fire on Travis, a 200-pound **chimpanzee**, after he cornered a cop in a cruiser at around 3:30 p.m.

Police aren't sure what triggered Travis' wild-in-the-jungle rampage, though Conklin said the ape had been acting odd in 70-year-old owner Sandra Herold's home, and neighbors claim he suffered from Lyme disease.

He said she gave him Xanax in tea to quiet him, but the chimp grabbed the keys to open the kitchen door, went outside and started banging on car doors to indicate he wanted to go for a ride.

"He's a very clever chimp," Conklin said.

Meanwhile, Herold called family friend Charla Nash, 55, to help round up the bonkers chimp.

"Just as Nash arrived at the house and exited her vehicle, the chimp went up to her, jumped on her and began biting and mauling her," Conklin said.

"This is unprecedented with this **chimpanzee**," he added, noting Travis had lived with Herold and her late husband for nearly 13 of his 16 years.

A frantic Herold wrestled with Travis, then called 911. Herold suffered minor wounds in the struggle.

"She retrieved a large butcher knife and stabbed her longtime pet numerous times in an effort to save her friend, who was really being brutally attacked," Conklin said.

After mauling Nash, who was "very seriously injured," Travis roamed the property as cops swarmed in.

The wounded Travis zeroed in on one cruiser, running to one side and trying to open a locked door. He quickly scooted to the other side, ripping off a side mirror while opening another door.

The trapped cop inside shot Travis several times in self-defense. The mortally wounded ape then staggered back into his house.

"They followed the blood trail in the house, and he was in his cage, dead," Conklin said.

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Mayor Dannel Malloy of Stamford said the bizarre attack was not unexpected.

"Wild animals are wild animals," he said. "It's just the power of these animals . . . We should never forget that."

Conklin speculated Nash, who had visited before, may have confused the chimp by wearing her hair in a different style. "Today the friend had her hair up," he said.

Don Mecca, a friend of Herold and her late husband, said he was stunned, noting that Travis was normally "so well behaved."

The chimp liked watering flowers, wine, expensive steak, brushing his teeth and even watching baseball games on TV. Neighbors also said he liked to pretend to drive his owners' cars - including a pink Cadillac convertible.

Travis also fed hay to the horses near his house in a rural part of Stamford.

He briefly rooted for the Mets when Stamford native Bobby Valentine was the manager, but later changed his allegiance to the Yankees, his owner said.

"He loves baseball. He likes anything with action," Herold said in a 2003 interview.

He also dressed himself and could log onto a computer, she said. "If I cry, he'll lick my tears," Herold said.

Neighbor Tom Kennedy said Herold treated the chimp like gold.

"I've never seen anyone take such good care of an animal," he said. "She loved him."

Despite being domesticated, Travis had a wild side.

In October 2003, he bolted from his owners' SUV and occupied an intersection in the heart of Stamford, holding police at bay for a few hours.

Cops arrived with more than a dozen cruisers but had difficulty catching the diaper-wearing chimp, who continued playing in the street and occasionally charged officers. No one was hurt.

Travis was somewhat of celebrity during his younger days. He did TV commercials for Coca-Cola and Old Navy and even appeared on "The Maury Povich Show."

Conklin said that the laws for owning chimps are stringent and had been "tightened up" locally in recent years, but that the Herolds were "grandfathered" in and legally owned Travis.

Prior to the 2003 incident, Travis had been well known around Stamford because he rode around in the truck belonging to Herold's towing company, Desire Me Motors in Stamford, and would wave to passers-by.

Additional reporting by Doug Healy

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